DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 159 728 CS 204 404

AUTHOR Bennett, James R.
TITLE How to Defend Ourselves Against Corporate Image and Ideology Advertising.
PUB DATE 78
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (29th, Denver, Colorado, March 30-April 1, 1978) ; Best copy available

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Business Education; *Critical Thinking; English Instruction; Higher Education; Mass Media; *Persuasive Discourse; *Propaganda; *Rhetorical Criticism; Secondary Education; Social Attitudes; Social Influences; *Teaching Methods
IDENTIFIERS *Advertising; *Intensify Downplay Approach

ABSTRACT

Since teachers have been encouraged to give attention to advertising, product advertising has been the subject of study, but because of the large amount of money spent on them, two other aspects of advertising need special attention: corporate-sponsored image (which deals with characteristics and image of the company rather than with products or services) and ideology advertising (the propagation of ideas and controversial social issues in a manner that supports the interests of the sponsor while downgrading the sponsor's opponents). The student should use such tools as classical rhetorical awareness of the speaker, knowledge of informal fallacies, and Hugh Rank's "Intensify/Downplay" approach. Study of a corporate-sponsored film would include questions such as: Who paid for it? What are the explicit and implicit purposes? How truthful are the claims and assertions? How does it intensify the sponsor's own good and its opponents' bad? What does it conceal that might alter our opinion of the claims? What are the formal and informal fallacies in the message? and What verbal and nonverbal devices are employed to persuade? These tools and questions, or slightly modified ones, can be applied to study such advertising as the corporation film put out by Chesebrough-Pond Corporation, "Family," and the ideology advertisement published by Chromalloy American Corporation. (TJ)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

James R. Bennett

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

ED159728

How to Defend Ourselves Against Corporate Image and Ideology Advertising

James R. Bennett

University of Arkansas

In 1971 the NCTE by national resolution urged teachers of language and literature to give more attention to the language of commerce. I believe I have seen a response to that appeal in an increased attention to product advertising in textbooks and journal articles, and, I assume, in the classroom. I want to talk a few minutes about two aspects of corporate advertising, two powerful aspects, which have received almost no attention as far as language analysis is concerned. They are the corporate-sponsored image and ideology films and magazine ads.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

S. P. Sethi in Advocacy Advertising and Large Corporations[1] defines corporate image (or institutional) advertising as having

> . . . as its primary emphasis building a good image for the corporation and its management or keeping the corporate name in the public eye. As contrasted with product or service advertising, it deals with the characteristics of the corporation itself rather than with those of its product or services. (p. 8)

Whirlpool backs its commitment to pride, honor, and honesty by a bald eagle in flight. Mobil asserts its support of the public good with a picture of the ballet dancers it sponsors for television. In contrast, ideology (advocacy) advertising is that part of image advertising devoted to "the propagation of ideas and elucidation of controversial social issues . . . in a manner that supports the position and interests of the sponsor while expressly . . . downgrading the sponsor's opponents" (p. 7).

Corporate image and ideology advertising is language controlled by an enormous amount of money and technical expertise. Sethi estimates that

CS204404

"Total institutional image advertising by corporations" increased "from $145 million in 1970 to $224 million in 1974" (p. 15), and such advertising is growing significantly. Contrasting points of view lack even a fraction of this wealth. This extraordinary persuasion power of corporations has received, is receiving very lit e scrutiny from people concerned with the precise use of language. The result, it seems to me, is a one-sided, almost monopolistic corporate point of view in image and ideology messages, an hegemony by corporations over information.

An ex-student of mine who teaches in a local junior high school sent me the other day a copy of the Curriculum Newsletter of the Fayetteville Public Schools. On the front page in capital letters underlined was the announcement: "ATTENTION SECONDARY SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHERS! There is a free-loan film series as well as beautiful teacher materials called American Enterprise, available through Modern Talking Picture Service." The article goes on to accentuate the virtues of the five thirty-minute films, the teacher's packet of background materials, the student-project spirit masters, and a large full color poster. All free from Phillips Petroleum Co.: Phillips' version of the American economic system.

This is only one of the hundreds of free films from corporations to be found in the Educators Guide to Free Films, a catalogue as large as the Little Rock, Arkansas, telephone directory. The Thirty-Sixth Edition (1976) of the Guide contains 716 pages with 4,246 titles from 461 sources divided into twenty-two subjects, an impressive increase over the 102 pages and 671 titles in the 1941 first edition. A count of the first three pages of each of the subjects (omitting religion) discovered 325 titles produced by business, 384 from the military, 122 by government (mainly federal), 47 by educational organizations, five by foundations, and 68 miscellaneous (foreign government travel films, charity organizations, etc.).

Consider one of the topics covered in the Guide--Aerospace Education. In the first three pages six films by corporations, four by the USAF, and thirteen by NASA boost fighter aircraft, missiles, and space flight. In the first thirteen pages forty-six films exalt space flight. Only nine of these directly derive from corporations (TRW Systems, McDonnel-Douglas, and Thiokol Corporation), but the twenty-seven by NASA and the eight by USAF reflect the heavy involvement by corporate contractors. The point to be made here is that all of the films on aerospace education--free to public school teachers--advocate space flight. Not one film is available free (and perhaps not even available for a fee) that criticizes the corporate-government-military space priority over other national priorities, such as housing, feeding the poor, controlling pollution,crime, literacy. Educators Guide to Free Films thus serves the NASA-USAF-TRW McDonnell-Douglas-Thiokol military-industrial-media propaganda machine in spending millions each year to sell space flight to the American people.

In the opinion of the publisher of the Guide, these free films are "one more step in this march of progress."

How can we correct this imbalance in the use of language and information?

Apparently few dissenting films are available free. So the best thing a teacher can do who wishes to provide students with a balanced, critical view of America is to help them develop skills for self-defense, especially, I believe, a skeptical stance toward the versions of reality fabricated by the corporate-military-media complex financing most of the free films. Perception of the Guide's imbalance helps greatly. Teachers can tell a class the bias of the Guide. And teachers can show the bias by close analysis of a film.

The method I have employed in classes is a combination of 1) classical rhetorical awareness of the speaker in any communication, or, drawing upon fiction criticism, persona analysis; 2) knowledge of informal fallacies; and

3) Hugh Rank's "Intensify/Downplay" approach, which was recently endorsed by the NCTE Committee on Public Doublespeak. I divide eighteen questions into two parts to emphasize speaker and message.

A. The Speaker.

1. Who paid for the film (the sponsor)?
2. How much did the film cost?
3. What is the ethical reputation of the sponsor and of the advertising agency which made the film?
4. Is the sponsor a small independent business, a subsidiary of a conglomerate, or a multinational?
5. What is the source of income of the film's sponsor?
6. What are the total assets and net earnings of the sponsor?
7. What is the purpose or interest of the sponsor in making this film?

B. The Message.

1. What is the technical quality of the film?
2. What are the explicit and implicit purposes of the film itself?
   What kind of company or service or idea does the film claim to represent or advocate?
4. How truthful are the claims and assertions?
5. Describe how the film intensifies the sponsor's own good and its opponent's bad.
6. What does the film omit or conceal that if known would alter our opinion of the film's claims?
7. Describe how the film downplays its sponsor's bad and its opponent's good.
8. What verbal and non-verbal (music, images) devices are employed to persuade the audience of the truth of the film's claims?
9. Identify all of the formal and informal fallacies in the message.
10. To what quality of the audience does the film appeal?
11. What sort of audience (level of intelligence, education, knowledge, social class) does the film assume?

Let me suggest how this method works by applying it briefly to the Chesebrough-Pond Corporation's film "Family," distributed free through Modern Talking Picture Service, Inc.

The 1976 Guide describes the film in these words:

This film, in full color, shows how one corporate "family" through continuous effort and teamwork, serves the ever-changing needs of the family of man. From vaseline and its related products to clothing, production, research, and quality control, we see how the manufacturer's

concern for the customer comes through.

The editor of the Guide, that is, presents each film uncritically just as it is represented to him by the sponsor. The film advertizes Chesebrough-Pond as a family-like, public service company.

Chesebrough-Pond--or CP--is a conglomerate that sells everything from Prince Matchabelli cosmetics to Ragu Foods. In 1974 its sales were $561,257,000, its advertising expenses $45,800,000, its net earnings $43,611,000. The intensified purpose of the film is to convey an image of the corporation as one big, successful, honest, skilled, non-racial, non-sexist, happy family serving the nation by serving its employees and its customers. The downplayed purpose of the film is to increase sales and profits. The film assumes an audience of average intelligence and appeals to our credulity through numerous techniques of persona enhancement, intensify-downplay, and informal fallacies.

The most obvious device to intensify CP's own good is the repetition of the "family" motif--at least twenty times verbally and through numerous pictures. Arthur Herzog in The B.S. Factor calls this the "oneness" con; Richard Olmann in Teaching About Doublespeak labels it the "homogenizing we": here it functions to persuade the audience that the interests of the stockholders of CP are identical to those of the employees and the consumers. Logicians will perceive immediately the fallacies of false analogy and hypostatization. The association of a word that means parents and children or any group of persons closely related by blood with a conglomerate corporation, Vaseline, and Cutex, is at least audacious.

People trained in verbal analysis can easily spot verbicide with a text before them. But a film proceeds rapidly, and this film--as are all of the corporate sponsored films I have seen--is supported by highly professional sound, color, and editing. It is not easy for even a trained person to critically appraise such films in one viewing. How much more difficult it is,

then, to discern what is omitted. The family ploy downplays the entire context of maximizing profits and competition and the scattered locations of a large multi-product corporation. Furthermore, the public service theme, the second main motif of the film, will also not sustain close inspection. An article in Forbes describes CP's "highly efficient marketing system." CP knew how to play the "slot-machine affair" of the "new products game" in creating and marketing Vaseline Intensive Care Lotion. Was their aim to enhance the "family of man," as the film suggests? Not at all. It was done through "market positioning," i.e., finding a marketing opportunity and exploiting it shrewdly for profit.[2]

The second major concealment in the film is the criminal behavior of CP's health products division. I am not referring merely to the Measurin case described by Morton Mintz in By Prescription Only, the fraudulent advertising campaign of CP's sustained-release aspirin, Measurin, in 1966. That case falls into insignificance compared to CP's deadly 1973 Pertussin Medicated Vaporizer. The Wall Street Journal reported from eleven to twenty-one deaths from this product. Only under pressure from the FDA (itself needing prodding by Nader's Health Research Group) did CP finally cooperate with a recall of the product. This image film, we can say, is all intensification of the sponsor's good. Naturally.

Another powerfully persuasive and growing vehicle of commercial language similarly unexamined is the image and ideology advertisement in magazines and newspapers. Mobil Oil's highly loaded ad in Parade and other Sunday supplements costs several hundred thousand dollars per year. Sethi in Advocacy Advertising perceives a danger in these ads which applies equally well to free films: to "The extent that such advertising becomes widespread and is used by a significant number of large corporations and industry groups, there is a danger of their squeezing out alternative viewpoints from the public

communication space and thereby impairing public access to information from all sources." And Sethi believes that such advertising has become widespread without a balancing expansion of alternative viewpoints.

I want to examine briefly one ideology advertisement and add to Rank's intensify/downplay analysis Orwell's 1984 and Ohmann's "How to Look for Ideology and Doublespeak in Ads: Questions to Ask."[3] The term "doublespeak" combines Orwell's terms "Newspeak" and "doublethink," referring to totalitarian methods of erasing history in order to enforce orthodoxy and eliminate dissent. Ohmann asks such questions as: Who is the advertiser? What is the explicit purpose of the ad? What is the implicit purpose of the ad? What audience does the advertiser assume? And so on; such as we asked about films.

The ad I will examine was published in the June 1976 issue of The Atlantic Monthly by the Chromalloy American Corporation in the form of a letter to the American people. The Chromalloy American Corporation is a relatively small multinational holding company for nine separate companies ranging from Angola gold to toilet bowl cleaners. Its net earnings for stockholders in 1975 was $21,707,000, or about half that of CP. The explicit purpose of the ad is to assure Americans that if we all join together behind goodthinkful free enterprise against maneuvering, divisive politicians who seek deceitfully to gain public office in order to tinker with the free enterprise system through excessive regulation, we can continue to enjoy the golden goose of "the highest standard of living ever known in the history of civilized man."

What is downplayed? What are the memory holes? The actual diversity and conflict in America, the actual decline of free enterprise and the rise of oligopoly and monopoly, the unaccountability of corporate power, corporate crime, the potential value to the public of the FDA, the SEC, and all the other government regulatory agencies, the existence of intelligent and honest public officials, poverty and unemployment in America, and so on.

The chief implicit purpose of the ad is to justify the managers and the stockholders of Chromalloy (and of other corporations) in making all the profits it can, unrestrained by government regulation or by conflicts with labor unions. A second implicit purpose is to discredit representative government and to develop a greater loyalty to corporations under the term free enterprise than to the government. Doublethink is rampant here: The advocacy of free enterprise while participating in the international concentration of economic power; the denunciation of government regulation when government possesses apparently the only power now available to restrain monopoly and to encourage the competition Chromalloy champions.

Chromalloy is above all a patriotic company--Chromalloy American, eagle vigilant, concerned over the cloud that obscures the sunrise of our Bicentennial Year, identifying with the American people against unscrupulous politicians and with that people's awareness of the harmony of capital and labor, rejecting bungling alterations of our system of free enterprise, and opposing vehemently the murder of the"good old American goose" of free enterprise and gold. But it is also a statesman-like corporation, able to think of "difficult national and world problems" with equanimity, and superior to divisive politicians and petty quarrels. Many things are downplayed: the profit-maximizing purpose of corporations, the primary allegiance of its officers to the stockholders, the political lobbying of the executives, the self-interest of the managers and stockholders in a minimally regulated economy and an unaggressive labor movement. Considerable doublethink is present also: the strenuous advocacy of American nationalism and competitive individualism combined with Tennyson's hope for peace through cooperation and brotherly love. It seems close to the Ministry of Truth's slogan in 1984: "War Is Peace." The notion of the moral superiority of the U.S. has enabled the U.S. to maintain a double standard of morality in international affairs, communism aggressive by definition, but not capitalism.

The specific audience is that of The Atlantic Monthly, a middle-of-the-road middle to upper-middle class magazine. What is downplayed in the ad regarding the audience is the point of view of the poor and other outsiders in society who have not been successful within the system; the ad addresses those who have made it and don't need unions and think they don't need government assistance or regulation of monopolies or of corporate crime.

The ad appeals to our fear of unprecedented problems, our patriotism, our belief in progress, our suspicion of politicians and oppressive government, our pride in being No. 1, our cupidity, and our desire for peace. Downplayed are our real reliance upon Congress and regulatory agencies to solve problems such as price-fixing and rapacious strip mining, the complex individual meanings of patriotism, our pessimism regarding the superiority of corporations no matter how corrupt or feeble over government, and so on.

If one wished to apply familiar verbal analysis to the ad, the list of fallacies and propaganda devices would be long indeed: abstraction, affective language, ambiguity, argumentum ad hominem, argumentum ad populum, unstated assumptions, begging the question, band wagon, cant, cliché, insufficient evidence, experiencer deletion, false statement, fear appeal, flag waving, unsupported generalization, homogenizing we ("The American people is"), and so on. But this kind of analysis has been all too often scattered and surface. The Orwell/Rank/Ohmann combination of analysis of image and ideology advertisements gives focus and order to investigation. We are directed to consider what is more and less important for study, to discover where language is in the service of great power, and whether that power and its language are honest and in the public good not only by examining the language of the message, but by examining with equal intensity and patience and scholarship what has been omitted and suppressed.

NOTES

[1]Advocacy Advertising and Large Corporations (Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath, 1977.)

[2]Forbes, 109 (June 15, 1972), p. 28.

[3]Teaching About Doublespeak (Urbana, Ill.: NCTE, 1976), pp. 41-59.